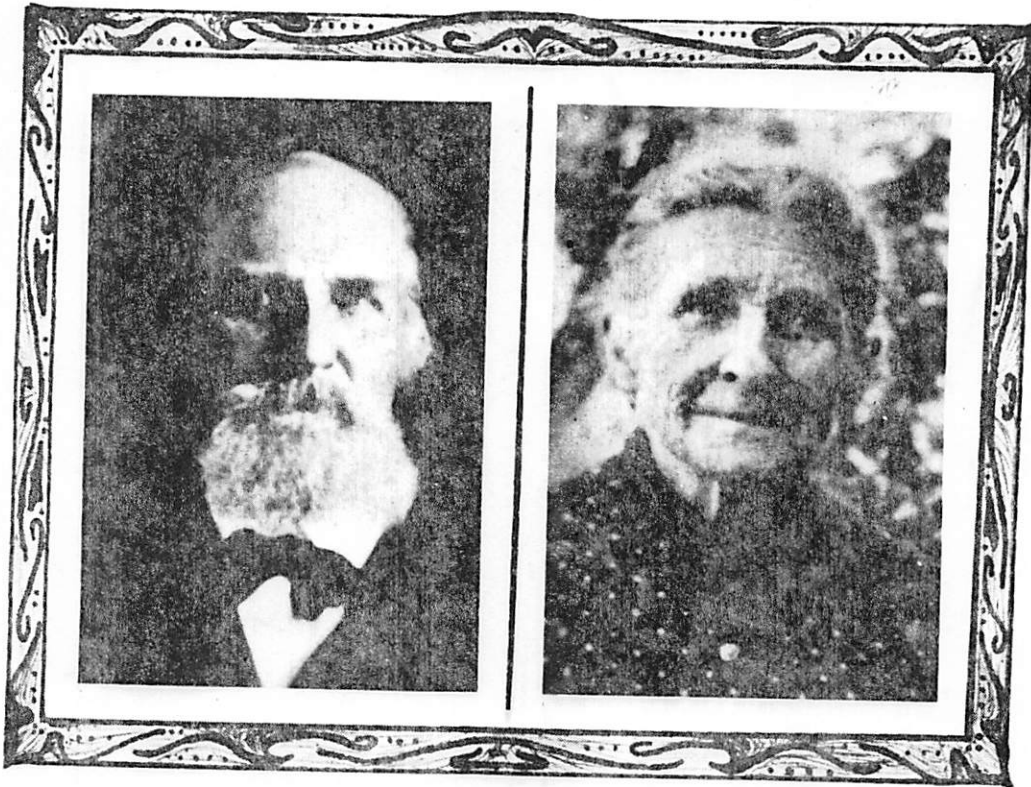


## WILLIAM McDONALD — SARAH JANE SHIRTS



### Early Life

William McDonald was born Nov. 16, 1834, at Crawfordsburn, a small town near Belfast, in County Down, Ireland. His father was James McDonald and his mother was Sarah Ferguson.

While he was still a young boy, two Mormon missionaries came to this home and told the family of the restoration of the gospel. This visit changed William's life. His parents accepted the missionaries' message whole-heartedly. They were baptized in 1841. From this time the family had one goal in mind — to raise the money necessary to leave Ireland and go to America where they could be with the body of the Church.

Although many of their friends turned against them when they joined the Mormon Church, the McDonald family had many warm friends among the members of the Crawfordsburn Branch of the Church. When it came time for them to leave for America, these friends held a social in their honor. Many came to see the family off and wish them well on their journey. One young man was crying as he said goodbye. William's father asked him why he was crying. He replied that he was

crying because he wanted to go to America, too. William's father asked him why he didn't come then if he had such a great desire. The young man replied that he couldn't go to America because he didn't have any money. William's father then offered to pay the young man's way and he joined the McDonald family in their journey to America. This young man later played a part in William's life.

William and his family landed at New Orleans and sailed up the Mississippi River by boat to Nauvoo where they lived for a time. Although William was just a young boy, he worked with his father in helping to complete the Nauvoo temple. When the saints were forced to leave Nauvoo, he worked with his father and his brothers to get the money necessary to buy two yoke of oxen and wagons and equipment for the family to cross the plains and join the saints in the Rocky Mountains.

### Early Days in Utah

William was fifteen years of age when he arrived in Utah. The family spent the first winter

at Alpine, a small community near the present site of American Fork. Here, William joined with his brothers and built a home for his mother and the family.

In the spring of 1851, the family moved to Springville in Utah County. Again the McDonald boys built a home for their mother and worked to support the family.

In 1853, Chief Walker made war upon the settlers in Utah and Sanpete Counties. At the age of 18, William served as a guard in this war. His commander was John D. Lee. One of his duties was to ride to the different ranches and warn the settlers and move them from their homes into the safety of the fort.

### Marriage to Sariah Shirts

From the time that William had arrived in Utah, he had worked very hard to help to support his mother and also to get a start for himself. His ambition was to own his own land. However, wages were small and his fund grew very slowly. During this time, the family were receiving letters from the young man whose fare to America had been paid by William's father. This young man had come west but had not remained in Utah. He had gone on to the gold fields of California and now wrote of the easy money that could be obtained there. He urged William to come to California and get in on these high wages.

William decided he would leave Springville and go to California. His mother strongly opposed this move. She was afraid that if he went he would become interested in making money and forget the Church as many members who had gone on to California had done. She felt he would be going against the advice of the prophet, Brigham Young. She coaxed and pleaded and used all of her influence to get William to stay in Springville.

William assured his mother that he would not forget the Church or even remain in California. He would go there only long enough to get a "strike"; then he would return to Utah with money to equip a ranch of his own. He refused to be persuaded against the move and in the fall of 1853, he bought a team and wagon and started out alone for California.

He got as far as Iron County in southern Utah when he stopped to spend the night at the home of Peter Shirts, one of the earliest settlers of Iron County. Here William met Sariah Jane, Peter's young daughter. Cupid accomplished what his mother's pleading could not, and William, forgetting about going on to California, began to

court Sariah for his wife. They were married on Dec. 10, 1853, at Cedar City, Utah.

The young couple had very little of this world's goods with which to start their married life, but they were young and in love, full of hope and enthusiasm for the future. They remained in Iron County for one year. During this time, William leased some land and raised a large crop of wheat. After the wheat was harvested, he tried to sell it as he desired to return to Springville. He found that no one wanted to buy the wheat. He could not sell it at any price. Finally, he stored the wheat and moved his wife to Springville. Two years later, in 1856, when the crickets ate the grain in Salt Lake Valley, this wheat became valuable and he sold it at a high price.

### Living at Springville (1854-59)

William built a home for his family at Springville and remained there for the next five years. His first child, Jane, was born in Springville on Oct. 19, 1854. Two more children, Sarah Ann and William, Jr. were born there. During this time William was appointed by Brigham Young to locate agricultural sections of land for settlement.

When it was known that Johnson's Army was on its way to Utah in 1857, an army of one thousand men was raised to protect the saints. William was a volunteer in this army. He was instructed to bring two horses with him when he reported for duty in Echo Canyon, one horse to ride, the other to lead with supplies. William had the two horses, but he did not have any rope to tie his supplies to the pack horse or with which to lead the pack horse. He got round this difficulty by cutting the tails from the horses and braiding rope from these tails. He served in this army in Echo Canyon until General Johnson agreed that his army would enter Salt Lake Valley peaceably.

In February, 1858, William and his wife made the trip from Springville to Salt Lake by wagon. The purpose of their trip was to receive their endowments and to be sealed to each other for time and eternity. Although William had been baptized many years before in Ireland, he was re-baptized at this time. Re-baptism was a common practice in the Church in these early days. William and his wife, Sariah, received their endowments in the Salt Lake Endowment House and were sealed on Feb. 16, 1858.

### The Move to Wasatch County.

In 1859, William went to Wasatch County in the area now known as Heber City. He built a home and moved his family into it. This home was inside the fort. The family lived inside the



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Fort until 1861. William then built a house on the land he had homesteaded two miles north of Heber. Most of his life was spent here. Sixteen of their twenty children were born to William and Sariah in this house.

William was one of the first men to take water from the Provo River for irrigation. He and his brother, John, engineered a ditch for carrying water from the Provo River to their farms. Their instruments were a bottle filled with water for a level and a stove pipe for sighting and setting grade for the ditch. With these crude instruments, they were able to lay out the course of the ditch so accurately that later the upper part of this course was used by the Wasatch Canal Co. with very little change. The original ditch, known as the "Bill Mac Ditch," remains today and waters the land originally owned by William as well as many other farms.

(2) In 1865, William took his wife's sister, Elizabeth Ann Shirts, as a plural wife. Elizabeth Ann had lived with William and her sister, Sariah, since their marriage. William and Elizabeth Ann were sealed in the Endowment House on Oct. 28, 1865. He built a home for her by that of her sister. Twelve children were born to them there.

#### The Black Hawk War.

William served as a soldier in the Black Hawk Indian War from 1865 until 1868. He was appointed as the Commander of the First Battalion of Cavalry. He served in this capacity until Chief Black Hawk made peace in 1868.

There were many bloody skirmishes between the Indians and the Mormon settlers during the Black Hawk war. The settlers were better equipped for fighting, but the Indians had the advantage of knowing every canyon in the area. They would stay in these canyons, leaving only for surprise raids when they would swoop out, murdering settlers and stealing cattle and supplies. To follow them back into the canyon was certain death because of the opportunities for ambush. As a result the fighting continued for over three years and many prominent settlers as well as Indians were killed. Peace came when Chief Black Hawk, dying of consumption, signed a peace treaty and retired to Spring Lake, between Santiquin and Payson, where he died in peace in 1870.

William was forced to move his family back in the fort at Heber City in 1866 in order to keep them safe from Indian raids.

#### The Treaty with Chief Tabby.

While the Black Hawk War was raging, Chief Tabby of the Ute Indians, who were settled on the

reservation in Uintah Co, went on the war path. Brigham Young sent word to William Wall of Wasatch County to take thirty-five men and go to Uintah and try to make a peace treaty with Chief Tabby. William was selected as one of the men to go on this mission.

The party took a number of cattle and several wagon loads of supplies for the Indians. When they reached the reservation, they took over the government fort, or stockade, which is near what is now the town of Tabiona. This stockade was built by placing heavy logs in the ground perpendicularly. Behind each crack another log was placed making the fort very safe. The men dug a well in the center of the stockade so they would have a supply of water.

At first Chief Tabby refused to meet the white men. His braves circled the fort constantly, just out of rifle range, screaming at the top of their voices. At night they would build fires around the fort and the screaming and yelling would continue. This went on for many days. The men in the fort needed strong nerves to keep calm.

After days of suspense, Chief Tabby sent word that he was willing to have a conference with the white leader. They met just outside the fort. At first Chief Tabby said that he would make peace only if two men in the fort from Sanpete County whom the Indians disliked were turned over to him as prisoners. Of course this request was refused. William Wall told Chief Tabby that he had supplies and water to hold out a long time and in the end all of the braves would be killed if he didn't make peace. Chief Tabby then agreed to sign the treaty. The treaty was soon written. William witnessed its signing.

#### Service to His Community.

William served as the first treasurer of Wasatch County. He was also a selectman for the county for several years. He served as an officer of the Wasatch County Militia as long as it was necessary to maintain a county army for the protection of the settlers.

William's willingness to serve and even risk his life for the good of his community is evidenced by his service as a soldier and an officer in the Walker and Black Hawk Indian wars and in the Echo War against Johnson's army.

William spent his life as one of the most prominent and respected farmers and stock-raisers of Wasatch County.

#### A Strong Testimony

William had a strong testimony of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. He was made a High Priest while he was living in Springville. He was

not yet twenty-five years of age. He served faithfully as a ward teacher and in any other capacity which was asked of him. He was a firm believer in the power of prayer. He had a strong desire that an accurate record be kept of his family for genealogical purposes.

#### Death at Provo

After the death of his first wife, Sariah, William and Elizabeth Ann moved to Provo, Utah.

He was hale and hearty and attended the Encampment of Utah Indian War Veterans at Mt. Pleasant, Utah in 1920. At this time his picture appeared in the *Deseret News* and he was honored as one of the last surviving men who had witnessed the signing of the treaty with Chief Tabby.

On Nov. 2, 1921, William went to the polls to cast his vote. He was always anxious to exercise this privilege. Later that day he became ill. He died that evening, just two weeks before his 87th birthday. He leaves a rich heritage of courage, work, and faith for all of his descendants to share.

Sariah Jane Shirts was born Dec. 27, 1838, at St. Louis, Missouri. The Shirts family had come from Germany in the early part of the Eighteenth century and settled in New Jersey. Her grandfather, Michael Shirts, was born in New Jersey but moved to St. Clair, Columbiana Co., Ohio. He served with George Washington through out the Revolutionary War.

Sariah's father, Peter Shirts, joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Kirtland in 1833. He worked on the Kirtland Temple. He received a special blessing from the hands of Martin Harris. He was intimately acquainted with the prophet, Joseph Smith. The prophet blessed his son, Don Carlos Shirts. The Shirts family followed the Church when it moved westward from Kirtland to Missouri. It was here that Sariah was born.

The family moved with the saints to Nauvoo, Illinois. Sariah's father worked to help build the Nauvoo Temple. When the prophet was killed the family moved again with the saints. Sariah's mother, Margaret Cameron Shirts, died during the long trip across the plains in 1849. From that time on, Sariah, who was only eleven years old, cared for her sister Elizabeth Ann, who was only one year old when her mother died.

The Shirts family stayed only a short time in Salt Lake City. The father, Peter Shirts, was called to go to Iron County as a scout. He was to make peace with the Indians, build a saw mill and a flour mill, and prepare the land for settlement. Sariah kept house for her father and brothers and cared for her baby sister under these primitive pioneer conditions.

In 1853, a young man, William McDonald, who was on his way to California, stopped at the Shirts home. He fell in love with Sariah and they were married on Dec. 10, 1853. The young couple stayed in Iron County for a year and then moved to Springville, taking small Elizabeth Ann with them. In 1859, they became some of the first settlers of Wasatch County where they remained.

Sariah was a pioneer mother in every sense of the word. Under pioneer conditions, she gave birth to twenty children. She buried nine of these during infancy or young childhood. Her daughter, Mary McDonald Young, described some of her mother's problems in raising her family. She told of how Sariah raised her babies without safety pins. She also told that Sariah could not nurse her babies. With no refrigeration or baby bottles or nipples, this was a real problem. Sariah solved it by taking a willow with a pithy center and wrapping it with a cloth until it would stay in a medicine bottle. The milk would seep down through the willow and the baby would suck the milk through the rag.

As a wife, Sariah faced all of the hardships of pioneer living. She cooked and sewed for her large family. She saw her husband leave many times as a soldier to fight in the various Indian skirmishes, never knowing if she would see him again.

Sariah loved the Church. She loved to talk about the gospel, although she did not attend church often because of poor hearing. She did her own work and sewed without glasses until she was over seventy years of age.

In 1918, former President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, sent special congratulations to Sariah as one of the outstanding mothers of the west. The report of this honor and a short account of her life was given in the *Relief Society Magazine* in February, 1918.

Sariah died April 20, 1919, at her home north of Heber City, at the age of eighty years.